

# We must use our Arctic resources wisely

As the world awakens to the impact of changing climates on the Arctic, a typical reaction of those "down South" is to fear the North and to try to shut down human activity here.

In his recent book "Arctic Doom, Arctic Boom, the Geopolitics of Climate Change in the Arctic," Barry Scott Zellen makes the case that an ice-free Arctic can provide many benefits. I agree. In the introduction, I wrote that the Arctic will never compete with the rest of the world for people, but the Arctic is rich with the resources people need.

To understand sustainable living in the Arctic, you have to have sustained thinking in the Arctic. You have to live it, over time. Those of us who live here have a unique perspective that often surprises those from temperate climates.

Most Americans imagine the high latitudes as cold, remote and as mysterious as the moon. But to those of us who live here, the Arctic is home. The Arctic is heritage. The Arctic is our here-and-now and our hereafter.

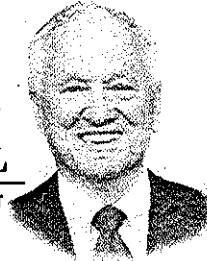
As the first Alaskans learned long ago, in a cold, harsh environment you must care about others. You waste nothing. You share to survive. Every hunter's prize is a gift, not just to that hunter but to one's family and village.

Throughout the world, the same sense of shared responsibility must be awakened as we address the needs of the global environment. Pollution knows no borders. All rivers eventually run into a common sea. All living things breathe the common air.

In reality, it is a collective world, but one in which we live so privately. Without concern for other people, for their needs and wants, activities for strictly private gain become destructive, not only to others but eventually to oneself.

WALLY  
HICKEL

COMMENT



In Alaska, we are as proud of our development accomplishments as we are of our environmental victories. Sustainable living requires both. A large percentage of the resources of the future will come from the Arctic, the oceans and space. In the case of the Arctic, instead of fearing to use our resources, we must use them wisely.

At Alaska's North Slope, nature condensed a continent of food into an ocean of oil. Our history of development, with the exception of the Exxon Valdez disaster, boasts the finest environmental record in the Arctic world.

In the last 30 years, industry has shrunk the size of the drilling "footprint" to one quarter. No waste products are left on the surface. These innovations and many more need to be shared with the non-Alaskans who care about protecting the beauty and diversity of our land.

We in the Far North observe that the majority of the Earth's surface, including the oceans, is commons. It is commonly owned, or owned by no one, and therefore owned by all.

By my tally, 84 percent of the Earth's surface is commons and the commons is a key to the future, because when the human race learns to use the commons correctly, there

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will be no legitimate reason for poverty.

Nearly all of Alaska is commonly owned. As a result, our economic/political system is a combination of a free-enterprise economy, a constitutional democracy and public ownership of resources.

Our "owner state" goes beyond socialism and capitalism. We survive and subsist from the commons. We fund government from the commons.

Before we became a state in 1959, Alaskans were poor people living on rich land, exploited by Outside interests. But our Statehood Compact with the federal government and our innovative constitution require us to develop our natural resources "for the maximum benefit of our people." This works well.

To be able to benefit from the Alaska economic model, policymakers worldwide must take the time to understand the northern experience and welcome it. When they do, they will discover that the Day of the Arctic is an exciting new frontier and nothing to fear.

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